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ABSTRACT

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs, characterized by the special needs of the language learners, are described and a review of the literature on a functional-notional approach to the syllabus design of ESP programs is presented. It is suggested that effective ESP programs should teach the language skills necessary to function and perform satisfactorily in a given function. The theoretical basis for an effective ESP curriculum can be found in a functional-notional syllabus design, which emphasizes the communicative purpose of the language. Originally designed by the Council of Europe, a functional-notional approach identifies the functions, or things that can be done through language, for which learners need the language and the notions (i.e., meanings and concepts a learner needs to communicate) that they must handle with it. Categories of functions used to gather data include ordering or requesting, giving instructions, making suggestions, and socializing. The functional-notional approach is closely related to the communicative approach and is learner-centered and self-motivating. A study is reported that focused on need analysis and curriculum design for an ESP program, and particularly concerned an ESP for Food Service in Texas A&M University. Because "order/request" and "instruction" were the most frequently required functions, a curriculum that focused on those two functions was recommended. Examples of appropriate units of study are noted. Contains 8 references. (LB)

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A FUNCTIONAL-NOTIONAL APPROACH FOR ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES(ESP) PROGRAMS

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Abstract

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs are characterized by the special needs of the language learners. A review of the literature as regards a functional-notional approach to the syllabus design of ESP programs has been conducted. Assessment of learner needs based on language functions are discussed. A curriculum that focuses on language content arranged around language functions is described and recommended.

During the past several decades, there has been dramatic growth in the number of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs. ESP is a language course or a program in which content and aims of the course are fixed by the specific needs of a particular group of learners. English for Science and Technology, and English for Nursing, are examples of ESP courses.

ESP programs are more useful than general programs in two ways. First, their obvious relevance in addressing students' needs make them more motivating than more general programs. Higher motivation may generate higher achievement. Second, ESP programs are far more cost-effective than more general courses, at least after initial start-up costs are absorbed.

Some ESP materials, however, involve little more than structural drills and exercises, where "This is a spanner" replaces "This is a book" (Long & Richards, 1987). Effective ESP programs should teach the language skills necessary to function and to perform satisfactorily in a given function. The theoretical basis for an effective ESP curriculum can be found in a functional-notional syllabus design.

A functional-notional approach puts its emphasis on the communicative purpose of the language. It provides for the teaching of everyday, real-world language use with realistic learning tasks. It recognize that the speaker has a real purpose for speaking and something to talk about. So from the first lesson language features such as vocabulary and pronunciation are selected according to their importance in performing relevant functions. Therefore, emphasis on communicative purpose and the identification of the immediate needs of learners can meet the requirements of ESP programs. The present study focused on need analysis and curriculum design for an ESP program, and particularly concerned an ESP for Food Service in Texas A&M University.

Functional-Notional Approach

Background. A functional-notional syllabus was originally designed by the Council of Europe, a body which was founded in 1949 and now includes all Western Europe. The syllabus was designed for adult foreign language instruction to meet the students' social, vocational, or academic needs (Finnocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983). They tried to "break down the global concept of language into units and sub-units based on an analysis of particular groups of adult learners, in terms of the communicative situations in which they are characteristically involved" (quoted in Finnocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983, p. 10).

The Council explored the language and cultural content that would enable these learners to communicate and interact with speakers of other language. They particularly suggested that language was much more appropriately classified in terms of what people wanted to do with the language (functions) or in terms of what meanings people wanted to convey (notions) rather than in terms of the grammatical items typically emphasized in traditional language teaching models (Finnocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983, p. 12).

Categories of Function. A functional-notional approach identifies the functions for which learners need the language and the notions they must handle with it. Functions are described as things that can be done through language. Categories of functions expressed in language have been defined under different headings by several different researchers.

van Ek (1980), for example, distinguishes six categories of function in verbal communication:

1. Imparting and seeking factual information
2. Expressing and finding out intellectual attitudes

3. Expressing and finding out emotional attitudes

4. Expressing and finding out moral attitudes

5. Getting things done (suasion)

6. Socializing.

In the present study, after a thorough literature review, five categories of functions were employed as part of gathering data: asking order/request; giving instructions; making suggestions; socializing; and miscellaneous.

Specifications of Notions. Notions are the meanings and concepts the learner needs to communicate. Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) defined notions as "meaning elements which may be expressed through nouns, pronouns, verb, prepositions, conjunctions, adjectives, or adverbs" (p. 14). They classified notions under two headings--general and specific notions. *General* notions refer to universal linguistic phenomenon such as time, space, quantity, motion, matter, case, and dexis. By *specific* notions, they mean the structural and vocabulary items which involve the words following the functional expression. By combining functions with notions, practical language objectives, such as giving information about who we are, or finding out someone's opinion about something, can be produced (Chamot, 1983, p. 86).

Communicative Approach. The functional-notional approach is intimately related to the communicative approach. In a functional-notional approach, the ability to use real, appropriate language to communicate and interact with others is the primary goal of language learning. The approach put emphasis on "what people want to do or what they want to accomplish through speech," rather than on grammatical aspects of the language (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983, p. 13).

If communicative competence is truly a goal, then the usual structure of syllabi should keep in mind the fact that communicative purposes are differ greatly according to situations and topics, and should try to accommodate these differences. Referring to syllabi that emphasize communication, Brumfit (1980) comments that, "We are not teaching a limited set of behaviors, but a capacity to produce those behaviors: a capacity which cannot help enabling its user to behave in many ways other than those specified by a limited selection" (quoted in Long & Richards, 1987, p. 129).

In the same context, Widdowson (1984) suggested that "actual communication involves the use of interpretative procedures to associate particular instances of behavior with familiar schemata and to modify them when necessary by using a knowledge of syntax and semantics as a resource" (p. 238). It is important, therefore, to provide learners with kinds of problem-solving strategies for interacting and coping with various situations rather than providing lists of rules or of expected behaviors.

Learner-Centered Approach. The functional-notional approach is learner-centered in the sense that "information about and from learners is incorporated into all stages in the curriculum process, from initial analysis" (Nunan, 1990, p. 17). In a functional-notional curriculum, the contents being taught are primarily determined by the learners' different communication needs.

Widdowson (1984) interpreted learner needs in two ways, using "goal-oriented," and "process-oriented" definitions. *Goal-oriented* needs relate to terminal behavior, the ends of learning. The *process-oriented* needs relates to transitional behavior, the means of learning. He suggests that "a goal-oriented approach creates a conflict between what the learner needs to do in learning and what he or she needs to have acquired *after* learning, a process-oriented approach

based on subject methodologies contains no such conflict because these needs converge in the learning process itself" (italics in the original, p. 187). He emphasized the learning processes reflected in specific methodologies rather than static goals defined as language knowledge.

Determining the language needed for a particular setting, therefore, is a very important and necessary step in curriculum development. Once the language skills necessary to function satisfactorily in a particular area are identified, then a syllabus for language development can be planed.

Collecting and analyzing data to establish the communication that really occurs provide a basis for selecting aims of the syllabus design. West (1984) illustrated job-site observation as an important ingredient of needs assessment. Among several stages of observation, he suggested, the relevant manager's and supervisor's input about communication on the job is most valuable for identifying what management considers to be important communication breakdowns. (p. 145). The sources of data gathering would be either interview or survey form, or both. And the more specific the question items, the more useful the data would be.

Enhanced Motivation. The functional-notional approach is very self-motivating since the curriculum is specifically designed to serve the immediate needs of the learners. As Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) point out, a functional-notional curriculum recognizes the basic needs of all human beings. The approach involves teaching the appropriate language needed at the five levels of human needs, beginning with the need for survival (exemplified in van Ek's Threshold Level) to the most elevated need for self-realization or self-actualization as a human being (p. 27).

Motivation is also enhanced since most adult learners are expected to have previously-

acquired knowledge and apply it to second language learning. Thus, "the training becomes challenging and interesting to them, further increasing their motivation--and, ultimately, skill development and self-confidence" (Leaver & Stryker, 1989, p. 272).

Methods and Procedures

Supervisor's Questionnaire. Needs analysis is essential to designing ESP courses. In the present study a Supervisor's Questionnaire was developed to identify important communication breakdowns on the work-place. Questions were broken down into six categories, which were:

1. most frequently used phrases
2. most confusing phrases
3. phrases required in writing
4. phrases difficult to understand in pronunciation
5. affective consideration
6. other comments.

Data Analysis. Data gathered from the Supervisor's Questionnaire were analyzed according to the functions of the language. Five categories were used:

1. Asking order/request, e.g., "Make waffle mix."
2. Giving instructions, e.g., come on these days of the week.
3. Making suggestions, e.g., "May I help you?"
4. Socializing, e.g., "Thank you."
5. Miscellaneous, which did not belong to the above four.

Finally, the data were categorized in a 6x5 matric defined by the six communication breakdown areas and the five language functions.

Results and Conclusion

The data are summarized in Table 1. As can be seen from Table 1, it was found that "order/request" and "instruction" are most frequently required functions regardless of the areas of communication breakdowns. Those two functions accounted for counts of 97 and 199, respectively, of the total of 364 data points. Thus, they represented 81 percent of the total. As a result, designing a curriculum focusing on the functions of order/request and instruction was required.

Table 1
6x5 Categorization of the Data

	Order/ Request	Instruction	Suggestion	Socializing	Miscella-neous
Frequency	63	83	12	8	7
Confusion	15	75	0	1	6
Writing	8	17	1	1	10
Pronuncia-tion	10	24	3	0	6
Affective	1	0	0	0	7
Others	0	0	0	0	6
Total (364)	97	199	16	10	42

Another characteristic of the results is that most of the phrases took the imperative form, such as "Make waffle mix," "Fill egg rack," "Put signs out." This is somewhat consistent with the study by Mary Galvan from the Resources Development Institute in Austin, Texas, who

found that 40% of vocational language makes use of the imperative form (quoted in West, 1984, p. 147). The implication of this feature of language use is that vocational ESP programs should emphasize following commands and probably use Total Physical response (TPR), the command action teaching technique, as a teaching methodology.

In conclusion, the use of curriculum that focuses on language content arranged in terms of "order/request" or "instruction" together with the language items (notions) is recommended. The units of these categories could well be:

Unit 1
1. Functional category: request
2. Notional category: kitchen

Unit 2
1. Functional category: request
2. Notional category: serving area

Unit 3
1. Functional category: instruction
2. Notional category: kitchen

Unit 4
1. Functional category: instruction
2. Notional category: serving area

A sample of these units is illustrated in Table 2. The language items of kitchen area (notions) associated with the requesting (function), which belong to Unit 1, are described in the table.

Table 2
Sample Units

Type of discourse	Skill	Function	Exponents	
			Vocabulary	Structure
spoken	speaking listening	request cleaning	floor soap powder	Clean .... Go get .... Bring me ....

ESP curricula, particularly for vocational education, should include the language skills necessary to perform satisfactorily on the job. The type of curriculum described above would meet the instructional needs of the individuals needing more English instruction in the field. The method of designing functional-notional syllabi based on learners' needs can be applied to other types of learning situations, as well, to good effect.

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